

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 477

PS 009 703

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TITLE Learning About Life the Playful Way: From Kindergarten to Play Group. Situation Report.
REPORT NO SR10-77 (e)
PUB DATE Oct 77
NOTE 15p.
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Day Care Services; Demonstration Programs; *Early Childhood Education; Early Experience; Educational Objectives; Foreign Countries; *Kindergarten; *Play; Playgrounds; *Preschool Programs; *Program Descriptions
IDENTIFIERS *West Germany

ABSTRACT

This paper describes various types of child care services available for preschool children in West Germany. The paper emphasizes the importance of play in children's cognitive and social development. Preschool experiences guided by a trained staff are considered an important complement to family life. According to the paper, West Germany is progressing well in providing programs for parents who want or need child care services. The paper describes a variety of services which are currently being provided, tented or planned. One such service is the "Playmobile", a bus equipped with games and activities which stops at various playgrounds. Creches for children under 3, kindergartens for children from 3 to 6, and play groups for school-aged children are run by both public and private agencies. Other programs include mothers' groups where mothers gather while their children play, company kindergartens provided for the children of employees, family day care services provided in private homes and integrated kindergartens for disabled and non-disabled children. The importance of outdoor playgrounds and provisions for them are also discussed. The final section of the paper considers programs for 5-year-old children which are planned to provide smooth transition into elementary school. (BD)

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ED148477

Situation Report

Learning about life the playful way

From kindergarten to play group

By Martina I. Kischke

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From kindergarten to day nursery - boarding kindergartens,
company kindergartens, daytime care centres

I. Situation report on kindergartens in the
Federal Republic of Germany

The facts give cause for satisfaction:- in 1969, the Federal Republic of Germany had kindergarten accommodation for about 1.1 million children; by 1975, the number had risen to almost 1.5 millions. This means that, in 1975, some 65% of children aged between three and six years had access to kindergartens. This total even exceeds the planning target.

In his press service for June, 1977, publisher Reichert notes: "As a result of this development, the projected targets of the 1975 overall education plan (e.g. places for 52% of children aged from three to four years) have been surpassed. The availability of kindergarten places in 1975 almost equalled the targets of the overall education plan for the year 1980."

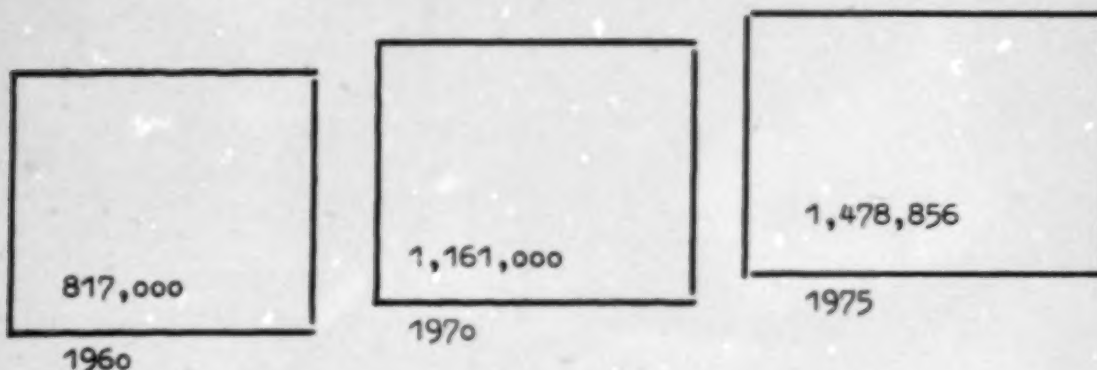
Not only the number of places increased. More staff were engaged, so that it was possible to devote more individual and specific attention to children. The kindergarten situation in the Federal Republic of Germany is thus being improved both quantitatively and qualitatively, the latter including the provision of new types of game and learning curricula. New programmes of this kind are being tested in 240 kindergartens under a supra-regional scheme scheduled to operate until 1980.

The aims are ambitious. The basic aspiration is to use playtime activities as a basis for children to learn about everyday life. After all, social conduct and attitudes can be learnt in group activities. However, there is no intention to seek to use kindergarten learning to substitute for family life. It's far more important that the former be employed as an effect means of augmenting the latter.

Dr. Andreas Mehringer, who for many years now has been head of the Munich Orphanage, stated in his book "Heimkinder" (children in

children's homes) (published by Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, Munich, autumn, 1976): "Whether one likes it or not, family education is irreplaceable. No-one can relieve parents of a number of major tasks in relation to their own children. Better alternatives have not yet been found.

Kindergarten places in the Federal Republic of Germany:



<u>Age</u>	<u>No. of facilities</u>	<u>Places</u>
Crèches (up to 3 years)	829	24,251
Kindergartens (3-6 years)	23,130	1,478,856
Special kindergartens (3-6 years)	554	15,712
Play groups (6-14 years)	2,376	82,730

(December 1975 figures)

Population of the Federal Republic of Germany:- 61.4 million

Brilliant success with the "playmobile"

It's a rather rickety old bus, but it's brightly painted in "pop" colours. Wherever it appears, it gets a boisterous welcome. It's not impatient would-be travellers, but children who are waiting for the gaily coloured vehicle. The veteran bus, which once plied the streets of Hanau, has been given a new lease of life in its role of "playmobile". Inside, there are plenty of surprises for youngsters -- clothes to dress up, sports gear and toys of all kinds.

The Youth Welfare Office of the town of Hanau was resolved to give local children more opportunity for fun and games. So with its cargo of pleasure, the bus trundles from playground to playground.

Werner Acker, who has full-time responsibility for the playmobile, is trying in this way to instil inspiration and the initiative to develop new ideas in Hanau's youngest citizens. He is keen to have the cooperation of parents in finding new forms of game. This is why the playmobile is manned by pedagogically trained experts of the municipal youth welfare office when it makes its rounds of the town.

The initiative taken by the city of Hanau underlines the demand raised by doctors, pedagogic experts and sociologists that children must be encouraged to play. It's while they're at play that youngsters work off their energies and learn how to conduct themselves in society. It's important, too, that they play not only at home, within the family circle, but also in groups with children of the same age.

This is an important social task in kindergarten education schemes. Kindergartens, which are designed for children from the age of three years upwards, are no "parking lots" for children who are a nuisance at home when their mothers want to go shopping. They certainly are a help to mothers who go out to work half-days. But priority is given to another feature - the imparting of training to augment family education. A 1976 report by the Federal Ministry for Youth, Family and Health states: "It is necessary for a child's development that, beginning about the fourth year of life, its education within the family be augmented and supported through experience and learning outside the family."

The majority of parents in the Federal Republic of Germany are proving cooperative. In fact the attitude of parents is so positive that the joint federal and regional commission for education planning, reporting in October, 1975, on the evaluation of pilot schemes in kindergartens, reached the following conclusion:

"The pilot schemes show that institutional pedagogical programmes for three to six-year-olds - in particular for five-year-olds - are largely accepted voluntarily by parents. With the exception of isolated cases, in which personal, family, social or ideological convictions were the determining factors, parents of children of pre-school age accept a convincing pedagogical programme aimed at augmenting family education. For them, it is important that their children are placed in the hands of academically trained and qualified personnel working in centres with modern play and learning

aids and well equipped facilities but without school-orientated demands being placed on the children."

II. Crèche, kindergarten and play group

Where needed, the system of extra-family education can function smoothly from the first day of life to the 14th year. The first stage in this is the "crèche" in which babies and toddlers are looked after in daytime. From the ages of three to six years, the kindergarten is the right address. For school children, there's the children's play group (up to the age of 14). These amenities are maintained by local authorities or welfare organizations. Since the end of the 1960s, more and more private kindergartens have been established parallel to the public amenities and these are financed by private parents' groups wishing to have their youngsters educated in accordance with special pedagogic methods. These chiefly concentrate on a "free" style of education often given the misleading description "anti-authoritarian". There are various types of private kindergarten, ranging from the so-called "Kinderladen" - a sort of "workshop" - to the "parent-child group". These types of kindergarten are generally to be found in big towns and cities in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Doris Wohlfarth's experiment

Doris lives in a small town close to Frankfurt-on-Main. She's 26, married and stopped going to work when her first child was born. Her son Markus has just turned four years old, her daughter "Biene" is two. Theoretically, Markus could have started attending kindergarten a year ago, but it would have been too difficult for Doris to have to take him there and collect him as well as looking after the baby, particularly since she has no home-help.

Doris, aware of the importance of contact with other children for her son's development, had an idea; she decided to get in touch with other mothers in the same predicament. "Operation Mothers' Rendezvous" was born. To begin with, the members met in a café frequented by young people. They publicised their plans by means of hand-drawn posters displayed in a chemist's shop and other shops.

"Operation Mothers' Rendezvous" is now an established feature of life in this small town in the Federal Republic of Germany. Meetings

nowadays are so well attended that they have to be held in a local community hall. The town gives financial support and a kindergarten nurse has been employed. The basic idea is that young mothers of children up to the age of about four should meet once a week, get to know one another and have their offspring playing together. The principle of "pre-kindergarten" activities is that children should integrate naturally into the group. This process takes place without their having to be separated from their mothers, as happens later in kindergarten. So there can be no psychological complications for the children.

Doris Wohlfahrt's experiment was a success. She herself comments: "Our children are far from being angels. They quarrel and fight among themselves. But the advantage of this is that they realize at an early age that they're not 'omnipotent' and thus learn more community spirit than egoism. Maybe group play among the children and communication among their mothers can be seen in a double sense as a means of improving or learning social conduct."

III. What's a company kindergarten?

Apart from the positive influence on the development of the child, there are other very tangible arguments in favour of kindergartens. They are of vital importance to working mothers. In this, company-run kindergartens play a key role. These are operated by many large concerns in the Federal Republic of Germany, providing a service for mothers in their employ. The lawgivers regard company kindergartens as "comforts", so that companies operating them can claim tax relief for the extra expenditure. Neither are those employers required to pay social welfare insurance for them. Under tax laws, "comforts" are listed as amenities designed to improve working conditions. A company kindergarten quite obviously comes into this category, which is very important for many mothers. However, the situation is different when it comes to employers who make money grants to external kindergartens. They must pay both tax and social welfare insurance.

Working parents or single mothers who send their sons or daughters to kindergarten cannot claim tax relief for the additional expenditure thus incurred.

IV. "Day-mothers" - a pilot scheme

There has been a great deal of discussion in the Federal Republic of Germany about possible alternatives to the crèche and the kindergarten. For many working parents, the generally strictly rigid opening and closing times of kindergartens present problems. Prompted by a report in the woman's magazine "Brigitte" in 1973, a country-wide discussion began about so-called "day-mothers". The Federal Ministry for Youth, Family and Health in Bonn decided to launch a pilot project. Just one year later, in July, 1974, the first "day-mothers" started work at Reutlingen in Baden-Württemberg under the pilot scheme financially backed by the Bonn government.

The families ministry outlined the project's aims as follows:

"The children who are to be placed in the care of day-mothers have gainfully employed parents and are therefore dependent upon care outside the family. Priority consideration is to be given to children from socially weak families. Generally speaking, day-mothers are to look after the children -- aged between one and three years -- in their own homes. They are committed to co-operating with the parents, to regular participation in brief preparatory and then practice-orientated instruction, to cooperation with advisers and to active support of ancillary scientific work. In return, they receive remuneration geared to the number of children. Between 15 and 20 day-mothers are at work at each of the centres where the pilot scheme is operating. The pilot scheme centres which engage day-mothers and receive grants from public funds are sponsored either by the local youth welfare office or a private body."

The ministry made its first interim report on the scheme two years later. The conclusion drawn: the experiment is a success. For working parents, the project has proved a boon and the day-mothers themselves say their experiences are positive. The ministry's report noted: "For most of the day-mothers, this is a worthwhile job during times in which their own children prevent them from working outside their own homes. They consider it positive, too, that this work gives them a wide variety of ideas and help for the education of their own children and that they can discuss and tackle common problems in group work. The public funds directed into day-mother activities permit many of the

women to give up their jobs. But financial considerations evidently do not play a decisive part in the decision to become day-mothers. They are far more interested in the work, which gives pleasure and self-confidence and a chance to perform a public service which opens up new fields of activity and interest."

The children who benefit from the scheme are specially selected and mostly come from "problem families" (single mothers or fathers who are compelled to go out to work) or from low-income families in which the parents must go to work. For all of these fathers and mothers, the day-mother scheme represents the solution of a serious problem.

What happens when the families ministry's funds cease to flow into the pilot scheme in 1978? The ministry's reply to this: "Consideration is now being given to a scheme by which an organization and financial plan would be devised in cooperation with the federal states involved and the local sponsors of youth welfare. This would not only facilitate continuation of the work of day-mother groups, but see that it were extended to other towns." Steps have already been taken in that direction. In two towns where the scheme was tested, organizations which work closely with the local youth welfare departments have assumed patronage of the pilot scheme. But generally speaking, once State financial backing for the pilot scheme ceases, parents will participate wherever possible in the financing of day-mother work.

V. "Integrated" kindergartens

Most people, on hearing the word "kindergarten", immediately think of laughing, playing children. But many people in the Federal Republic of Germany don't associate the word with the integration of both healthy and handicapped children in a kindergarten. Doctors and psychologists recommend just such a form of kindergarten training. For the handicapped child, it's positive to be together with healthy children since it provides incentive to adjust to others and motivation to develop abilities. Many a surfeit tenderness experienced at home is counteracted here. On the other hand, the non-disabled child learns a natural relationship with less fortunate children. Prejudices cannot creep in. This type of

kindergarten training thus could represent a start to better integration of the handicapped into present-day society.

The first kindergarten of this type was established in the early 1970s at the Munich "Children's Centre" run by Professor Hellbrügge, using the Montessori education principles. The experiment was successful and an "integrative" kindergarten is now to be opened in Frankfurt. Backing came from the Hessian state Social Affairs Minister, from the Regional Welfare Association, from "Aktion Sorgenkind" (a campaign to help problem-children), from the Church and from the city of Frankfurt.

The Evangelical-French-Reformed Parish, which is the sponsor of the "integrative" kindergarten in Frankfurt, argues that it is pre-school age which plays an important role in the development of handicapped children "...particularly in regard to the development of practical abilities." At the same time, the initiators of this kindergarten are concerned to ensure that handicapped and non-handicapped children should be "for" one another. Adults, too are to be included in the immediate environment of these children to play their part in the common learning process.

VI. Children's playgrounds are a "must"

The public authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany have long been aware of the importance placed by doctors and pedagogic experts on children's scope for play and inter-action with other children. Children of pre-school age must also have the chance outside kindergarten to work off their energies in play with their contemporaries. The demands of the experts take on vital significance in the big towns and cities which are so hostile to children with their lack of play facilities.

Several federal states in the Federal Republic of Germany have turned words into deeds in this respect. Hesse's Interior Minister Ekkehard Gries, for example, has just issued a decree containing more specific stipulations in relation to Hessian planning and building regulations. This lays down that, from now on, each property scheduled for development to contain more than three dwellings in Hesse must include a playground for children up to the age of six years. One other important feature is that the owners of existing properties can be compelled to provide play-

grounds there too if "required for reasons of health or for the protection of children". The playground decree contains precise directions as to the design and construction to be used. For example, a playground must not be situated more than 100 metres from the homes of the children for which it is intended. It must have wind shields and more play facilities than just a sandbox. Even such details as the annual replacement of sand in sandboxes are firmly specified.

Of very special importance, however, is one point of the new decree covering road safety. Playgrounds must be constructed in such a way that road traffic dangers are not immanent.

This latter regulation is important because it was only in the summer of 1977 that the Federal Supreme Court in Karlsruhe ruled that municipal and local authorities have a legal obligation to ensure that children's playgrounds are made safe against nearby streets and roads. This judgement, resulting from an appeal case, related to the case of a three-year-old boy in the Bavarian town of Nittenau. The boy had crawled under the fencing around a playground on to a street and been knocked down and seriously injured by a car. The parents had claimed damages from the town.

Explaining its liability ruling, the Federal Supreme Court declared that, in constructing the playground, local authorities ought to have realized that a boarding erected immediately adjacent to the road represented "no serious obstacle" for young children.

Points like this are also of importance for kindergartens and crèches where children stay until the afternoon. The urge "to see something new" is incomparably greater here, as is the danger of a child slipping under a fence on to the street.

VII. Facilities for five-year-olds

Most parents of small children nowadays are aware of the importance of play in the development of their sons and daughters. They have read about it in free leaflets published by youth welfare offices in the Federal Republic of Germany or been informed at "parents' evenings" run by kindergartens. However, this positive attitude to play changes suddenly in many parents when their little ones reach the age of five years.

With the approach of school attendance, those parents begin to want to see "results" from their youngsters. A survey carried out by the Hamburg Sample Institute showed that 34% of all mothers questioned complained of the "play-mindedness" of their offspring aged from five (1) to 12 years.

Under these circumstances, it's understandable that a project with the name "Facilities for five-year-olds", which reports on pilot schemes in kindergartens, preparatory school and elementary classes, attracted special interest on the part of the Joint Federal and State Commission for Education Planning in Bonn.

The project party launched its work in the spring of 1974, and initial findings were submitted to the commission in October, 1975. The experiment had proved successful. Basically, the idea was to sponsor five-year-olds pedagogically in such a way as to facilitate smooth transition to elementary school. The joint commission drew its conclusions and issued a directive:

"The Länder (federal states) are requested, even in the case of different organizational forms, to create the following provisions for the pedagogical sponsorship of five-year-olds -

- a) In collaboration between kindergarten and elementary school, common, or at least harmonized guidelines for the pedagogical promotion of five-year-olds, will be developed.
- b) The existing didactic programme in kindergartens and the curricula of elementary schools will be examined to determine whether they can assure a smooth didactic-methodical transition.
- c) A common specific advanced training for educators, social pedagogues and teachers must be guaranteed creating the right conditions for the realization of harmonized pedagogical-didactic concepts.
- d) Rules must be drawn up for concrete forms of cooperation between educators, social pedagogues, teachers and parents in facilities for five-year-olds in both kindergarten and elementary school and due attention must be given to favourable regional conditions for permanent cooperation (closeness to home).

Fulfillment of these framework requirements should be assured in conjunction with the sponsors of the kindergarten."

There can be no doubt about the great importance of work among five-year-olds outside the realm of family education. It is in this sphere that a pattern is set for the first school years. The report on initial findings of the pilot schemes noted in this connection: "In several pilot schemes, efforts are being made as early as pre-school age to eliminate obstacles to learning, speech impediments, behavioural defects and physical handicaps by way of additional special pedagogical, diagnostic and therapeutic measures with the help of expert personnel. Specific pedagogical measures taken at an early age make it possible to improve or even eliminate individual difficulties and defects."

In practice, this means that behavioural defects eliminated in a five-year-old child may protect the child at a later stage from having to repeat a class at elementary school and thus, in effect, "losing" a year of its life.

Prospects are good for country-wide sponsorship of children of immediate pre-school age in appropriate kindergarten facilities. The conclusions drawn as a result of experience gained in project groups sound optimistic: "The creation of new places in kindergartens for children aged between three and six years - augmented in some states through the determined expansion of accommodation in pre-classes and elementary stages - could bring about a situation within only a few years in which, with regional variations, an institutional pedagogical programme would be available for all five-year-olds. Proceeding from the assumption, based on pilot schemes, that almost all parents accept a programme of high standard, it could be expected that pre-school care could be extended to all five-year-old children in the Federal Republic of Germany."

Just how glad parents are about kindergarten education work is exemplified by the remarks of a father whose son attended "Children's Day School 52", a communal amenity in Frankfurt. He said: "Alex attended that kindergarten from November, 1976 to July, 1977. Our experience is the best. There was sensitive and individual care. The lady in charge considers her target has been achieved if the children enjoy coming to her kindergarten."

The basic principle is natural education towards emancipation, or rather careful encouragement in that direction. Freedom of scope with guiding help."

"Children's Day School 52" is quite a normal kindergarten, like hundreds of others throughout the country. They have a common aim: to teach children about life while they're at play.

(IN-Press)